

Message Text

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63

ACTION PM-03

INFO OCT-01 EA-06 ISO-00 CG-00 DOTE-00 EB-07 IO-10 CIAE-00

INR-07 NSAE-00 RSC-01 L-02 SS-15 NSC-05 /057 W

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R 170125Z JAN 75

FM AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9110

INFO AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

SECDEF

CNO

COMNAVELECSYSCOM

CINCPAC

CINCPACFLT

C O N F I D E N T I A L WELLINGTON 0138

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MARR, AS, NZ, US

SUBJECT: OMEGA AUSTRALIA

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

COMNAVELECSYSCOM FOR PME 119

REF: STATE 9066

BEGIN SUMMARY: OMEGA ISSUE GENERATED EMOTIONAL PUBLIC CONTROVERSY IN NEW ZEALAND IN 1968. ALTHOUGH PASSIONS STIRRED BY VIETNAM CONFLICT HAVE COOLED SINCE THAT TIME, WE BELIEVE CHANCES WOULD BE MINIMAL OF GETTING ANY POSITIVE GNZ ACTION ON OMEGA, AT LEAST BEFORE GENERAL ELECTIONS NEXT NOVEMBER ARE BEHIND US. END SUMMARY.

1. REVIEW OF EMBASSY FILES REVEALS THAT OMEGA ISSUE STIRRED FIERCE PUBLIC CONTROVERSY IN NEW ZEALAND BEGINNING IN JUNE 1968 WHEN NATIONAL GOVERNMENT UNDER PRIME MINISTER HOLYOAKE WAS IN POWER. CONTROVERSY CONTINUED FOR SEVERAL MONTHS.

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OPPOSITION WAS CENTERED IN THE UNIVERSITIES AND THE PRESS,

WHO CHARGED THAT OMEGA WAS LINKED TO COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM OF POLARIS SUBMARINES. THIS BEING THE CASE, ANTI-OMEGA FORCES CLAIMED, NEW ZEALAND WOULD BE TARGETED BY SOVIET UNION FOR NUCLEAR DESTRUCTION IN CASE OF WAR BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND THE USSR. THE THEN OPPOSITION LEADER, NORMAN KIRK, WHO LATER BECAME PRIME MINISTER, PUBLICALLY ATTACKED OMEGA AND CHARGED THE GOVERNMENT WITH MISLEADING THE PEOPLE IN CLAIMING THAT OMEGA WAS NOTHING MORE THAN A NAVIGATIONAL SYSTEM. ATTEMPTS BY HOLYOAKE AND OTHER SANER VOICES TO CORRECT THESE MISCONCEPTIONS WERE NOT SUCCESSFUL IN QUIETING THE UPROAR.

2. ALTHOUGH QUESTION OF VIETNAM NO LONGER TROUBLES GNZ-USG RELATIONS AND ANTI-AMERICAN LEFT LACKS ANY REAL ISSUE WITH WHICH TO BELABOR THE UNITED STATES, 1975 IS YEAR OF GENERAL ELECTIONS HERE. LABOUR GOVERNMENT IS ALREADY UNDER HEAVY ATTACK OVER ITS MANAGEMENT OF THE NEW ZEALAND ECONOMY AND IF SITUATION WORSENS DURING THE YEAR, AS SEEMS NOT UNLIKELY, GOVERNMENT COULD BE DEFEATED IN NOVEMBER IN SPITE OF ITS PRESENT LARGE PARLIAMENTARY MAJORITY. IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, WE BELIEVE IT UNLIKELY THAT GOVERNMENT WOULD WANT TO RUN THE RISK OF ALIENATING FAIRLY STRONG LEFT-WING OF LABOUR PARTY WHOSE SUPPORT COULD MAKE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN DEFEAT AND VICTORY IN NOVEMBER. ACCORDINGLY, AMERICAN APPROACH ON OMEGA WOULD VERY LIKELY ELICIT A NEGATIVE RESPONSE AT LEAST UNTIL AFTER THE ELECTIONS.

3. WE SHOULD PERHAPS COMMENT ON SUGGESTION IN PARA 6 OF REFTTEL THAT USG MAY BE FORCED TO APPROACH NEW ZEALAND IN CONTEXT OF A NEGATIVE RESPONSE BY AUSTRALIA OR A RESPONSE THAT IS TOO LONG DELAYED. TRANS-TASMAN TIE IS EXTREMELY IMPORTANT IN NEW ZEALAND AND LONG-DELAYED OR NEGATIVE AUSTRALIAN DECISION ON OMEGA, WHICH WOULD SURELY BE LEARNED ABOUT QUICKLY IN THIS COUNTRY, WOULD NOT CREATE THE BEST ATMOSPHERE FOR A POSITIVE NEW ZEALAND REACTION. RATHER, PSYCHOLOGICAL ADVANTAGE WOULD THEREBY HAVE BEEN GIVEN TO ANTI-OMEGA FORCES WITH POSSIBILITY THAT ANY NEW ZEALAND GOVERNMENT WOULD HESITATE TO TAKE THEM ON.

4. IN SPITE OF FOREGOING, WE WOULD SEE NO PROBLEMS IN
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APPROACHING GNZ ON OMEGA QUESTION WHENEVER DEPARTMENT WISHES US TO DO SO. IF APPROACH IS TO BE MADE, HOWEVER, WE WOULD ENVISAGE DOING SO, AT LEAST INITIALLY, INFORMALLY AT SENIOR WORKING LEVEL OF MINISTRY OF DEFENSE WHERE WE COULD EXPECT BOTH SYMPATHETIC HEARING AND SOPHISTICATED ESTIMATE OF CHANCES OF SUCCESS IF MATTER WERE TAKEN TO TOP LEVEL OF GNZ.
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